

Message Text

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TAGS: PINT, BE

SUBJECT: PROFILE OF NEW BELGIAN ECONOMICS MINISTER

REF: BRUSSELS 7524

1. FERNAND HERMAN, 43-YEAR-OLD SON OF A WALLOON FARMER, WOULD BE UNKNOWN TO THE ORDINARY BELGIAN VOTER BUT FOR HIS OCCASIONAL APPEARANCES ON TELEVISION TALK SHOWS AS AN ARTICULATE AND SLIGHTLY DIDACTIC EXPERT ON ECONOMIC ISSUES. HE IS AN ACTIVE MEMBER OF THE FRENCH-SPEAKING WING OF THE GOVERNING SOCIAL CHRISTIAN PARTY, BUT HIS NOT-INCONSIDERABLE POLITICAL ROLE IS ACTED OUT BEHIND THE SCENES. THAT ROLE CONSISTS OF TWO IMPORTANT ELEMENTS - ADVISER TO THE PARTY ON ECONOMIC ISSUES AND PERSONAL FRIEND AND CONFIDANTE OF CHARLES-FERDINAND NOTHOMB, PRESIDENT OF PSC. HERMAN HAS NO PERSONAL POLITICAL BASE OF HIS OWN. IN THE POLITICAL
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ARENA HIS STRENGTH WILL BE AS THAT OF NOTHOMB - NOTHING MORE.

2. ONE OF FOUR SONS OF A MIDDLE-CLASS FARMER IN THE LIEGE REGION, THE NEW ECONOMICS MINISTER STUDIED LAW AND ECONOMIC SCIENCE AT THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF LOUVAIN AND TOPPED HIS EDUCATION WITH A YEAR OF POST-GRADUATE STUDY AT COLOMBIA UNIVERSITY IN NEW YORK. HE BEGAN HIS PROFESSIONAL CAREER IN THE PRE-INDEPENDENCE CONGO, HELPING TO ORGANIZE A CONGOLESE POLITICAL INSTITUTE. AFTER INDEPENDENCE HE SPENT FOUR YEARS AS A COUNSELOR TO THE NEW CONGOLESE GOVERNMENT ON FINANCIAL AND ECONOMIC POLICY.

3. HE RETURNED TO BELGIUM IN 1964 AND TOOK A JOB IN THE TWO-YEAR-OLD NATIONAL SOCIETY OF INVESTMENTS (SNI), A LENDING INSTITUTION SPECIALIZING IN DEVELOPMENT LOANS. TWO YEARS LATER HE BECAME DIRECTOR OF THE INSTITUTION. AT THE SAME TIME HE BEGAN AN ACADEMIC CAREER. HE NOW LECTURES ON CONTEMPORARY ECONOMIC PROBLEMS AT LOUVAIN, AND IS ACTIVE IN DIRECTION OF CRISP, A MILDLY-LEFTIST ECONOMIC RESEARCH INSTITUTE. HERMAN, ROUND-FACED AND PREMATURELY BALD IS MARRIED TO A DUTCH WOMAN. HE IS BI-LINGUAL IN FRENCH AND FLEMISH AND SPEAKS ENGLISH.

4. A LITTLE-KNOWN TECHNOCRAT, HERMAN DOES NOT HAVE STRONG TIES WITH EITHER BELGIAN BUSINESS OR LABOR. THIS WILL BE BOTH A PROBLEM AND ADVANTAGE AS HE RECOMMENCES EFFORTS NEXT MONTH TO BRING THE TWO SIDES TOGETHER ON WAGE INDEXATION QUESTION AND GRAPPLES WITH FUTURE POLICY ON PRICES, AFTER CURRENT, PARTIAL FREEZE EXPIRES IN OCTOBER. RENNER

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